

A  
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF

CAMBRIDGE,

At St. MARY's,

ON  
COMMENCEMENT SUNDAY,

July 4. 1756.

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By JOHN ROSS, D.D. *R*  
AND  
FELLOW OF S. JOHN'S COLLEGE.

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CAMBRIDGE,

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M.DCC.LVI.

DISCOURSE

OF THE

UNIVERSITY

OF

CANTERBURY

AT ST. MARY'S



COMMUNICATED

BY JOHN BROS. D.D.

AND

FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

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ISAIAH xxxiii. 6.

*Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure.*

Or, as it ought to be translated: *Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and a strong salvation, and the fear of the Lord shall be their treasure.*

THE sublime Prophet, representing to himself by the assistance of the divine Spirit the distant events of Providence; and comparing the miseries, which he was then denouncing against the enemies of God, with the happiness of some favourite people; broke loose in the loftiness of his conceptions from the subject, in which he was engaged, and addressed himself to the latter in the words, which I have repeated to you. He foresaw some great revolutions of civil government, which have probably since made a figure in the history of mankind; and discerned the beginning, the progression, and the end of the various systems of human policy, which succeeded one another in the course of their duration. On the one hand; he beheld slavery, oppression, and poverty rise out of the ruins, which ignorance and irreligion had made: and on the other hand; he saw the most delightful prospect, which

can be represented to the human mind, the prospect of a great and powerful people enjoying all the blessings of wealth and tranquillity under the auspicious influence of science and religion. And last of all; with an authority superior and more decisive than that, which is drawn from the longest experience and wisest observation of the sons of men, he connects the causes and consequences of things together; and declares, that the stability, security, and prosperity of the times, which he had in view, were derived from those two great sources of national wealth and national greatness.

In conformity to this sentiment of the Prophet was the design of our royal and religious Benefactors, who dedicated these delightful retreats to knowledge, and enriched them with such plentiful treasures of literature. They believed, that an improvement in science would necessarily contribute to the general happiness; and that every person, who was employed in it, was employed in the cause of virtue, religion, and liberty. They intended, by providing for the accommodation of fit persons to receive and communicate instruction, to convey a blessing to the most distant times. They thought that the minds of youth ought to be prepared for the world; and that impressions ought to be made, and habits acquired before they entered upon the public stage of life. In short; they judged it necessary for this purpose to introduce them, in the beginnings of life, to the principles of science; to lay open the treasures of ancient wisdom; and to lead them, by contemplating the works of creation and providence, to trace out the nature and attributes



butes of the Creator and Governor of the world : and by a gradual deduction of consequences to learn their own nature also, with all the duties belonging to it, which relate either to God or their fellow creatures.

After therefore such illustrious and noble testimonies, which have been thus given to the usefulness of learning ; and after the long experience, which our own and all the polite nations of the world have had of the benefits derived from it ; we might reasonably hope, that no objections could be raised against the encouragement and support of science ; nor any consequences apprehended from a refinement of taste and improvement of reason, which might be dangerous to the liberties and virtue of mankind.

But the alarm hath been lately given ; and we have been told, that the establishment or growth of science hath ever been pernicious to civil society ; that it hath a natural tendency to break the spirits, and to undermine the virtue of the bravest people : and that it contributes at present to corrupt our manners, and is the principal cause of all that luxury, intemperance, and sensuality, which is the distinguishing character of every learned nation in Europe. Virtue and science, it seems, are, as it were, two planets in the moral system, which can never shine at once above the same Horizon ; but the former sets on one side as the light of the latter rises on the other.

It is therefore of the utmost importance to us, who are set aside by our institution to preserve the lamp of knowledge, and to convey it to posterity, to enquire into

the truth and reality of these assertions. It is a debt of gratitude, which we owe to the memory of our benefactors and founders, by whose bounty we are maintained : and to the character of those eminent persons, who formed the laws and discipline, by which we are governed. It is a debt, which we owe to our own characters : and is necessary to check the jealousies and suspicions, which may be raised against us by opinions so unfriendly to our present establishment. It is, in short ; a proper method to secure to us the continuance of the public favour, which we now enjoy in the highest degree under the government of the best of Kings : and which, next to him, we owe to the patronage, affection, and authority of that great Magistrate, who presides over us.

In opposition then to what hath been advanced, it may in general be observed ; that it is not impossible but this enemy to science may have mistaken the cause of the disorders, of which he complains ; and may have ascribed to learning and the liberal arts what really proceeds from some hidden weakness of human nature, or from some unknown imperfections of government. There is no subject of enquiry more difficult and perplexed than the revolutions and changes in the manners of a nation ; nor any, in which men are more apt to indulge themselves in false subtleties and unnatural refinements. Every one can observe, that the manners of a people are in constant progression, and either, on the one hand, advancing by policy and order to wealth and power ; or sinking, on the other, by indolence and  
luxury



luxury into barbarity and ignorance. But to discover the causes, by which they are influenced, and to assign the reason of every change, which is introduced, requires the most penetrating discernment, and must be taken from the widest and most comprehensive view of human affairs. The transitions from one character to another in the same people, like the shades of different colours on the same canvass, are often blended together in an imperceptible manner; and it is impossible, without the most exquisite art, exactly to determine the endings of the one, or the beginnings of the other.

The introduction of science indeed amongst a barbarous people is one cause, which must produce an evident change in their general character: and soon exert an influence over public and private life. Their views will be enlarged; the pleasures of life will be more delicate and refined; and their spirit and genius will, for a considerable time, be rising to higher improvements and a more liberal manner. And, in this progression and revolution of character, it must be owned, because it cannot be denied, that particular vices will probably grow up as well as particular virtues: but it will not be owned, that an improvement in science and a refinement of taste can ever be the source of them. And, if I am not greatly mistaken, the following observations will be abundantly sufficient to prove it.

For it may be observed in the first place, that an improvement in science naturally produces a spirit of industry. Wherever science fixes her standard, it sets every

every thing in motion, draws the attention of the gazing multitude, and rouses the slumbering faculties of the human mind from a state of inactivity and indolence. It raises a spirit of curiosity, promotes enquiry, and carries an improvement into every part of life. Though the persons, who are at first engaged in its interest, are few and inconsiderable in their number; though many may escape the contagion through stupidity and dullness; and others may be ruled by passions and prejudices peculiar to themselves: yet the spirit, which animates the few will soon spread; it will diffuse itself through the whole mass; and that flame, which was kindled, as it were from heaven, in the breast of one man, will warm the hearts, and enlighten the minds of a whole people. It is not indeed meant, that they will all become either philosophers or scholars. It is not for the interest of society, that they should. But it is meant that the genius of learning and science, if cultivated by a few, will gradually inspire others with industry in their several callings; that the riches of nature will be laid open; and that the necessity of labour to enjoy them will be known. A greater activity, diligence, and curiosity will be exerted in every business and employment. Trade and commerce will be enlarged, the mechanical arts will be improved, and every head will be employed in contriving, and every hand in executing some work, which will be useful to the public. That connexion between the arts and sciences, which Cicero and others have mentioned, is by no means fantastical and imaginary. It hath a real existence in the present case.



case. The liberal and lower arts of life are linked together by an indissoluble chain, and it is found by experience impossible to carry on an improvement in the one without carrying it on in the other. And thus; when all are employed in their several stations; when all are diligent to improve the talent, with which they are entrusted; and to perform the task, to which they are assigned by providence; and when every member applies its strength to the sustenance and support of the whole: then one great end of civil society is obtained; the weakness of individuals is assisted and the necessities are supplied by the labours of many; and men are made by seeking their own to advance the general good.

Let it be observed in the second place, that an improvement in science naturally produces a spirit of liberty. It hath been a common observation, that free governments are the only soil, in which the arts and sciences can flourish. The liberty, which reigns there, cherishes men of genius and parts, excites an emulation amongst them, and inspires an ambition of excelling. And it is not a less true, though a less common observation, that learning and the sciences are equally favourable to liberty: and either support the spirit of it amongst those, who are in possession of it already; or introduce it among those, who are not. The sciences can never be improved without a free exercise of reason: and a free exercise of reason in one instance will naturally make men fond of it in another. But a fondness for freedom will not confine itself to theory and speculation,

lation, it will operate in every action of life ; it will exert itself in favour of that, which is judged to be best, and will act effectually sooner or later though under the greatest disadvantages and against the most powerful opposition. Let a people be loaded with the heaviest shackles of civil and religious tyranny ; let their bodies be subdued by oppression and violence ; and let their minds be enslaved by the grossest inventions of a blind superstition ; let them esteem their princes and their priests as the vicegerents of God, and let them reverence them as the distributors of happiness both here and hereafter : yet if, through a happy coincidence of circumstances ; or the hard struggles of an extraordinary genius, the dawn of learning once break in upon them ; the face of things will be entirely renewed, and the extravagant notions, which had hitherto prevailed, will disappear, like phantoms, at the break of day. A spirit of mildness and moderation will enter into their councils, and a spirit of piety and wisdom will guide their devotions. In short ; their laws, their policy, and religion will become more conformable to the dignity of human nature, and more consistent with the interests of society ; and though the same plan of government be retained, and the same civil and religious distinctions may be retained also : yet the spirit of the whole will in reality be changed ; learning and the liberal arts, like fire, will purge off the dross of slavery and superstition ; and, the dross being purged off, the constitution will be purified and refined ; the boundaries of power will be exactly determined ; and the privileges of individuals will be discerned and secured.



A great part of the nations of Europe have happily experienced, though in different degrees, the effects of this political process. Letters and the liberal arts were lost to all of them for a period of several centuries. The uncontrollable power of Gothic barbarism buried in one vast and undistinguished heap of ruins almost every monument of human learning. In this age of ignorance and barbarity were forged the chains of false religion, which loaded the shoulders of all the inhabitants of the christian world, and subjected them to the slavery and dominion of Rome. And in this state of slavery did they continue for many generations, without the least ray of liberty breaking in upon them, till a few men, who had fled from the cruelty of a barbarous invader, transplanted from the east the small, though rich remains of Grecian learning. The necessities of these men obliged them to be liberal in communicating their treasures to others. They communicated them freely. They stopped the progress of authority by exciting a spirit of curiosity, and dethroned the tyrannical usurpers over human reason. In short, they laid the foundations of a future reformation in religion and politics, raised a great part of the fabric themselves, and left sufficient materials for carrying on the rest to perfection. It is to this we owe the blessed liberty and freedom of protestantism. It drew its birth from this remote age. It was nursed in its infancy by the scholars of the succeeding ages; and attained gradually its present strength and maturity by the help of that nourishment, which was plentifully supplied, and zealously distributed by them.

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But I must take the liberty to observe in the third place; that an improvement in learning and science naturally produces a spirit of virtue and religion. The authority of the Prophet hath already been produced to shew, that they are not incompatible and inconsistent with each other; and it will, I hope, soon appear, that they have a natural alliance and connection together. A principal part of science consists in the knowledge of nature and in the study of the visible constitution and frame of things. But from thence are derived, those great principles of religion and morals, which form the rule of life, and by representing the deformity of vice and beauty of virtue beget habits in the mind, which correspond to both. From thence we draw the knowledge of the faculties and passions of the human mind, and are taught how to improve the one and to restrain the other for the happiness of the public as well as of each individual. From thence we are led to honour and reverence the Creator and Governor of the universe, and to resign ourselves to the disposition of his Almighty Providence, which is the strongest support of virtue in all the variety of circumstances, in which we are placed. From thence in short, we are enabled to compare the constitution of nature and the genuine and indisputable system of Providence, which we daily experience, with what the Gospel of Christ teaches us to believe and expect: and to own the credibility of the one from the resemblance and analogy, which it bears to the other.

An



An improvement therefore in this important part of science can never be unfavourable to the cause of virtue nor dangerous to the social interests of mankind. For whatever disputes may arise about the origin of our morals, whether they depend upon argument and reason, or upon taste and sentiment ; or whether they proceed from both of them together ; they can never be corrupted by any application, which shall be made in this manner either to our reason or affections. The information, which will be given to reason, will guide us in the practice of our duty ; and the objects, which are offered to our affections, will either soften and moderate them ; or excite only those emotions, which are the foundation of real virtue.

But this is not the only study, in which we are engaged. It has been a considerable employment of the last and the present age to cultivate that refined taste, which enables us to judge of compositions of genius and the productions of the fine arts. It has been thought necessary to form and improve this by a diligent study of the great masters of Greece and Rome, who are so distinguished for the elegance of their stile and the justness of their sentiments. We fetch from them the foundations of knowledge in the beginnings of life ; enrich and adorn with materials borrowed from the same stock the works and labours of our riper years ; and guide our judgments in approving or condemning by the original standard delivered by them.

How successful we have been in imitating them I will not pretend to determine ; but sure I am, that we

are not worse members of society for endeavouring to do so. The best and most considerable writers of antiquity are always on the side of virtue; and in their pictures of human life paint the blessings, which are her constant companions, in the most amiable and agreeable colours. The study therefore of such writers as these can regularly have no other influence upon us, than to render our taste more just and refined, and our morals more pure and uncorrupt. And can any one be so little acquainted with human nature as to charge a refinement of taste with the prevailing vices of the present times? Is there any connection of the one with the other? or can the former introduce any other change in our manners than to make us more humane and benevolent and more ready to exercise every other social virtue? Does not a delicacy of sentiment with regard to the beauties of composition lead a man to a delicacy of sentiment with regard to the decencies of life? and will not an impropriety of conduct or violation of duty be more likely to give disgust and uneasiness to one possessed of this talent, than to another, who is void of every improvement in taste, and unacquainted with the most exquisite feelings of human nature? In short; can there be a greater instance of false philosophy or false politics, than to ascribe a national declension of virtue to the rise and improvement of taste, when taste and virtue are frequently united in the characters of individuals?

Permit me therefore to conclude, that what hath been said is sufficient to destroy the credit of the assertions, to which it is opposed: and let me for a moment draw  
your



your attention to a few reflections in which the greater part of this audience are particularly concerned, and which the occasion of the present solemnity will excuse me for the liberty of making. We are, it is well known, by our original institution retained and engaged in the service of the public. We have a great and important trust reposed in our hands. And nothing less than the character of the rising generation depends upon our diligence, integrity, and skill in discharging it.

We ought therefore to consider in the first place; that, if an improvement in science is naturally productive of a spirit of industry; such, who have had their education amongst us, as they were thereby put in a capacity of being, will doubtless be required to be more eminently active and industrious in their several stations. A degree of application will be expected from them in proportion to the opportunities, which they had of improving, and the care which ought to have been taken to enlarge their minds; and a defect of it, however unjustly, will generally be attributed either to the negligence or unskillfulness of those, who had the business of instruction committed to them. It ought therefore to be our principal care to keep the minds of youth in perpetual exercise and employment, and to guard against the dangerous corruptions of indolence and laziness. Those habits contracted in the beginning of life are seldom corrected; generally lay the foundation of a frivolous, or vitious character; and render men unwilling to cultivate any one affection, which can advance virtue, or to subdue any one passion, which destroys it.

We

We ought to consider in the next place ; that if an improvement in science is naturally productive of a spirit of liberty, the publick will reasonably expect that those, who are educated here, should always be friends to liberty and lovers of that constitution of government, under which we enjoy all the blessings, that liberty can produce. It will expect, that they should be enabled to distinguish between liberty and licentiousness, and be as much friends to authority, which is established by law, as enemies to oppression, which is against it. It will, in short ; expect, that they should always be willing to pay that reverence and respect to superiors, which is necessary to enable them to carry on the business of government, and be contented with the secure enjoyment of property and privileges under the protection of law and upon the terms of the constitution. It ought therefore to be our constant endeavour to check in those, who are committed to our care, the least appearances of that forwardness in censuring and boldness in contemning authority, which distinguishes the present age ; and to shew them upon every occasion how inconsistent they are with a true spirit of liberty. We ought to instruct them, that a regard to liberty will never produce such indecent and violent attacks, as we have often seen, upon an establishment and succession of government, which is the strongest, nay the only bulwark of our liberty. In a word ; we ought to inculcate to them, that it is the duty of every honest man and lover of his country, to take all opportunities of expressing his loyalty and affection to our sovereign and his illustrious family ;



family; and to strengthen the hands of a government, under which, we have hitherto had, and may still have, if we will ourselves, the secure and uninterrupted possession of the greatest and most invaluable blessings.

We ought to consider in the last place; that the natural connection between an improvement in science and a spirit of virtue and religion will raise expectations in the public, that those, who appear from hence on the stage of the world, should not only be good men, but good Christians. And indeed the business of education will be most imperfectly attended to, and most negligently executed, if we omit to imprint on the minds of youth the obligations to virtue as it is enforced by the motives and supported by the authority of the gospel of Christ. Every thing else, except that, will be too weak and precarious to be the foundation of the great art of life, and too narrow to comprehend all the various instances of human duty. The appearance of the son of God to instruct mankind must be looked upon as a new period; and the revelation then made, as a new covenant between God and man, from whence new interests, new principles of action, and new conditions of obedience arise. From thence we must date the knowledge of that, wherein our true happiness consists; from thence we must derive our true glory; and by the assistance of that alone, can we ever be able to produce that balance of the inclinations and steadiness of resolution, which are necessary to form the character of the loyal subject, good citizen, and benevolent friend to mankind.

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Upon the whole then ; let us all unite in contributing that service and benefit to the public, which our situation enables us to do, and which may reasonably be expected from us. Let us endeavour to answer the great ends of our institution, by cultivating principles of religion on the terms of the gospel, and principles of liberty and loyalty on the terms of the constitution. And let us always silence the objections of those, who hate us, and answer the wishes of those, who love us, by connecting our labours with the common good. The security and protection, which those, who have gone before us, enjoyed, is a proof of the sentiments of the public with regard to them : and the security and protection, which we at present enjoy, is no less a proof of the same sentiments with regard to us. And whatever glory and reputation may have been reflected upon them from the splendid names of their patrons and benefactors ; the same glory and reputation will be reflected on us. We are sure of transmitting one person to be commemorated in some distant time, whose munificence to us, and merit to the public will be equal to any in that long list, which our ancestors have transmitted to us : and whose name, as long as learning and liberty preserve any credit in the world, will be great and glorious in the memory of all posterity.

F I N I S.

